



News Release

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Public Health Agencies Work to Ensure Food Safety During the Games

From sickness to sabotage, Health officials are on guard
for Food Safety during the Olympic Games

(Salt Lake City, UT) – As the 2002 Winter Olympic Games approach, thousands of hungry dignitaries, media, athletes and spectators will descend on Utah. To help feed the hungry and thirsty throngs, catering businesses and food vendors are hiring temporary employees. This hiring rush could serve up food-borne illness if workers aren't properly trained in food safety. Health officials expect to see a number of small, non-licensed food service operations to pop up during the Games. So, the Utah Department of Health and six local health departments are working to educate caterers and vendors on food safety issues.

All food service vendors must obtain permits from their local health department to operate. Food service vendors include: existing restaurants, fast food operations, caterers, mobile trailers, vans, food carts, school organizations, volunteer and social groups. A Mass Gathering Permit may also be required. All food handlers must obtain a food handler's permit from their local health department. In part, food handlers learn about proper food temperatures, hygiene and cleaning procedures. County food inspectors ensure all food handlers have current permits during inspections.

Caterers are being asked to voluntarily submit workers hired after August 1, 2001, to background checks through the Utah Department of Public Safety. Participation in these checks will help ensure that caterers are aware of security issues, reduce the chance of food being used as an avenue for sabotage, and help protect their business and their customers.

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Catering service customers can help ensure the safety of their own event by following these simple steps:

1. Ask to see the company's permit to operate. The permit should be issued from the local health department within the last 12 months. If the permit is older than one year, the company should not be hired. If the business is unable to supply a permit, do not hire the caterer.
2. Ask to see the caterer's most recent inspection and permit reports. These reports cite any violations or poor sanitation. Your local health department can supply such reports.
3. Ask if the caterer is sending employees hired after August 1 through the Public Safety background checks. If so, ask the caterer to produce a written document stating this fact. If the company is not participating, find one that is.
4. After hiring a catering company, request in advance a list of names of all personnel who will be working on site. During your event, check the list to make sure it's accurate. If not, immediately contact the caterer.

State and local agencies involved in food safety checks in the Olympic Theater include:

Utah Department of Health

Utah Department of Agriculture and Food

Davis County Health Department

Salt Lake Valley Health Department

Summit County Health Department

Utah County Health Department

Wasatch County Health Department

Weber-Morgan Health Department